DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 306 CS 502 568

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TITLE Mass Media and Acculturation: Toward Development of an Interactive Theory.
PUB DATE May 79
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 5-7, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; *Adjustment (to Environment); *American Culture; Communication (Thought Transfer); Cultural Exchange; Cultural Pluralism; Culture Contact; *Immigrants; Information Dissemination; *Mass Media

ABSTRACT

An integrated, interactive theory of mass media communication and the acculturation process of immigrants challenges the traditional linear assumption that media communication is a stimulus to which immigrants' acculturation is a response. The acculturation process is a natural process of adaptation, occurring in and through communication; it is the process of acquiring the communication mode of the host society. The acculturation process is interactive and continuous, evolving in and through the communication of an immigrant with the new environment. The subsystems of the host society that are of direct and significant functional relevance to an immigrant's daily life are the most influential in the acculturation process. The role of mass media in this process is to provide cultural information beyond the immigrant's immediate environment. The media role is dependent on the receptivity of the immigrant, and is more limited than are the roles of personal and interpersonal communication in regulating immigrant behavior. Mass media works with interpersonal communication to reinforce acculturation and its influence is particularly strong during the initial phase of that process. (DF)

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MASS MEDIA AND ACCULTURATION:

TOWARD DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERACTIVE THEORY

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Paper presented at the annual convention of the Eastern Communication Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 6, 1979.

CS502567P

Introduction

The intent of this paper is to develop a foundation for an integrated, interactive theory of mass media communication and the acculturation process of immigrants. Five axioms and five theoretical postulates will be proposed by which the process of acculturation and the role of mass media will be described and explained.

Previously, an immigrant's media behavior was included in anthropological and sociological studies as one of the many indices of acculturation of social integration. (See Nagata, 1969, for a review of literature.) Typical aspects of media behavior are: use of publications (newspaper and magazine), radio, television, and movie-going. In a study of Canadian immigrants, Richmond (1967) reported that the newspapers and magazines explicitly and implicitly convey a knowledge of Canadian norms and social institutions. The influence of television has been noted as a possible source of acculturation. Graves (1967) included the possession of a television set as one of the items in his index of acculturation. DeFleur and Cho (1957), in their study of Japanese women, considered the amount

of daily exposure to radio (as well as television) as one of the acculturative variables. Movie-going was included by Spindler and Goldschmidt (1952) in their index of acculturation among Menomini Indians.

While the previous studies generally point to the acculturation function of mass media, the media variables have often assumed only an incidental role. It is not clear how and why mass media communication affects an immigrant's acculturation process. A systematic theoretical description and explanation of the underlying dynamics of mass media communication and acculturation need to be made before we can further explore more specific information.

Axioms

Acculturation refers to the "cultural transmission in process" (Herskovits, 1966, p. 170). With regard to immigrants, acculturation may be defined as the process in which the immigrants adapt to and acquire the host culture. The acculturation process is a natural process. Immigrants have the need and possess the capacity to adapt to their social-cultural environment, and to acquire membership in the various social groups upon which they depend (Axiom 1). (See Kim, 1979, for a fuller discussion of the axioms.)

Acculturation occurs in and through communication (Axiom 2). Acculturation occurs solely through the identification and the internalization of the significant symbols of the host society. A person

living in a social-cultural system must code or decode messages in such a fashion that the messages will be recognized, accepted and responded to by the individuals with whom he interacts. Through Communication, an immigrant comes to know and be known in relationships within the new environment. Communication allows and compels the individual to organize himself and to come to know his new milieu, and, therefore, to become what he is and what he will be.

In the course of varied communication transactions with others, the immigrant succeeds or fails to evoke the kinds of situations and relations in and through which he may pursue his goals. In time, the immigrant comes to utilize the communication mode of the host culture so that he can conform with greater fidelity to the sanctioned patterns. We also see changes taking place as an immigrant deviates from accepted patterns of the old culture and replaces them with new patterns of the host culture.

From the communication standpoint, then, acculturation may be defined as the process of acquiring the communication mode of the host society. The acquired communication competency to take the role of the members of the host society, in turn, reflects the degree of that immigrant's acculturation. (Axiom 3) For example, a Korean immigrant who sees his American friend, as if he were the American friend, is taught by acculturation to communicate with the friend according to American standards. It is through "taking the role of the other" that he is able to come back on himself, and so direct his process of acculturation.

If we view acculturation as the process of development of communication competency in relating to the host culture, it is important to emphasize the fact that such communication competency is acquired through various communication experiences. One learns to communicate by communicating. The acculturation is a cumulative result of the sum total of all communication experiences. The acculturation process, therefore, is an interactive and continuous process which evolves in and through the communication of an immigrant with his new cultural environment (Axiom 4). The immediate effect of the acquired communication competency to take the role of the other in the host society lies in the control which the individual is able to exercise over his own behavior and over his social-cultural environment.

The communication of an immigrant occurs primarily through personal observation of, and, interpersonal interaction with, people around him. An immigrant belongs to a set of subsystems within the host society. Those subsystems that are of direct and significant functional relevance to an immigrant's day-to-day life are the most influential in his communication-acculturation process (Axiom 5). Within the immediate social-cultural environment, the immigrant observes people communicating. The immigrant sees and hears how people think, feel, and react to various situations; how they make judgments, express their feelings and thoughts (verbally and nonverbally), and how they perform various social roles. Also, in the course of varied communication transactions with others, the immigrant gradually learns and internalizes the communication mode of the host culture.

Postulates

Mass media, on the other hand, enable the immigrant to extend the scope of his communication-acculturation beyond the particular subsets of the social-cultural environment to which he belongs. Through mass media communication, an immigrant may be exposed to the broader ranges of the varied elements of the host culture. (See Figure 1.) Mass media transmit messages which reflect the aspirations, myths, work and play, as well as specific issues and events of the host society. They explicitly and implicitly represent societal values, norms of behavior, and traditional perspectives for interpreting the environment. Such a socialization function of mass media communication is summarized by Gordon (1974) as being influential in (1) the images and stereotypes individuals possess of their environment; (2) the long-term value systems they posses; and (3) what they view as priority concern by way of the media's agenda-setting function (p. 13). In assisting the immigrant's acculturation, mass media assist the host culture to make possible that concensus and understanding among the individual components of the host society which eventually gives it and them the character not merely of a society but of a cultural unit.

A recent study of Korean immigrants in the Chicago area provides an empirical support for this acculturation function of mass media (Kim, 1977). The amount of an immigrant's exposure to American mass media, together with his interpersonal communication with Americans, was found significantly related to the "perceptual complexity" as

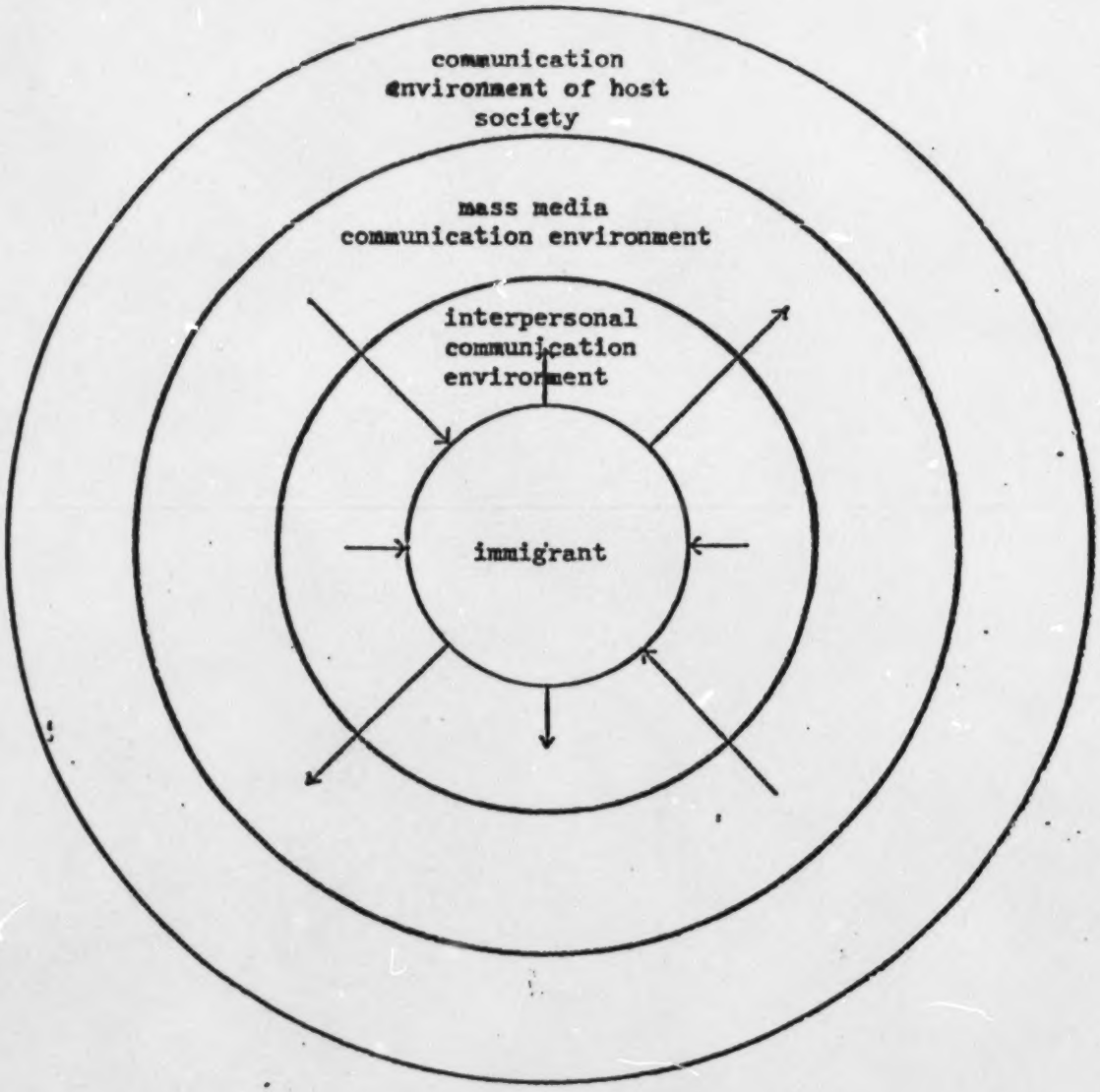

Figure (1): An Immigrant's Interpersonal Communication Environment and Mass Media Communication Environment in the Host Culture.

manifested in the immigrant's refined understanding of the American friendship pattern.

Postulate (1): In the acculturation process, mass media communication provides information about the host culture beyond the immigrant's immediate social-cultural environment.

While the mass media transmit to immigrants broader images of the host culture, it is ultimately the immigrant himself who defines the effectiveness of the acculturation function of the media communication. The transmission of the host culture via mass media is not as simple as the transportation of a commodity like bricks. The messages of the mass media have to be received and interpreted by the immigrant himself in order to be functional to the acculturation process. During the diffusion of media messages, a process of selection necessarily takes place. Each and every medium, and media content itself, inevitably tends to reach the place where it will be understood and appreciated. Media messages, therefore, can assist acculturation only as they are understood and appreciated. At the same time, the messages are understood and appreciated only to the extent that the immigrant is acculturated and has acquired the communication mode of the host society.

At this point, the traditional conceptualization of the mass media as a cause and the immigrant's acculturation as an effect

becomes less meaningful. The whole process of acculturation, in relation to mass media communication, can be compared to the bed which a river cuts into the surface of the earth. The channel is formed by the water, but the river banks also control the direction and quantity of flow. A system of interaction is established in which cause and effect can no longer be isolated; stimulus and responses are thus welded into a unit.

A few empirical studies have demonstrated such interactive nature of the acculturation function of mass media. Nagata (1969), for example, demonstrated the differences in mass media behaviors among first, second, and third generation Japanese-Americans, with an increasing use of American media across generations. Chang (1972) reported some differences, although not significant, in mass media behaviors among three groups of Korean immigrants--"cultural assimilation group," "bicultural group," and "nativistic group," distinctive in the patterns of change in cultural values.

In a cross-sectional analysis of Korean immigrants and their mass media behavior (Kim, 1978), an overall increase of mass media consumption was observed during the initial ten years of the acculturation process. The same developmental trend has also been observed among other ethnic immigrants including Nigerians and Mexicans, (Kim, 1979b). Further, the media behavior varied among immigrants with different educational backgrounds and English competence. Immigrants with a higher level of education demonstrated a higher level of English competency, greater motivation to

acculturate, and more exposure to mass media (Kim, 1977). Similarly, the Korean immigrant's choice of media and media content was also closely related to the overall acculturation level. The degree of exposure to the information-oriented content of the media (newspaper and radio-television news) was far more closely related to other indicators of acculturation (including the immigrant's perceptual complexity and interpersonal relationship formation with members of the host society) than the exposure to overall radio and television content. Aames, Aames, Jung and Karanbenick (1977) reported a similar finding in their study of recent Vietnamese immigrants: newspaper reading of the Vietnamese immigrants was a stronger indicator of their English competence than their television viewing.

These empirical findings clearly point to the interdependency of media offerings and the media behaviors of immigrants. Therefore, the acculturation function of mass media should be understood in an interactive conceptual framework.

> Postulate (2): The acculturation function of mass media communication is dependent upon the receptivity of the immigrant. The immigrant's media receptivity, in turn, is a function of his prior acculturation.

Having defined the interactive nature of the acculturation function of mass media, it is important to re-emphasize that an

immigrant's communication with his host cultural environment via mass media is only a part of the total communication process that an immigrant experiences. As discussed earlier, much of an immigrant's communication-acculturation occurs in and through his direct observation of, and interpersonal communication with, people around him in his immediate social-cultural environment. The immigrant's personal and interpersonal communication experiences provide him with more intense and detailed influence over his communication-acculturation process. Communication, in the presence of other people, controls the behaviors of the immigrant through its simultaneous feedback processes by controlling and regulating communication behaviors of an immigrant; personal and interpersonal communication presents the immigrant with detailed information about the communication mode of the host culture.

In this regard, mass media communication is limited in its potential acculturation function. The study of Korean immigrants (Kim, 1977) empirically demonstrates the relative importance of the acculturation function of mass media communication and interpersonal communication. While the immigrant's interpersonal communication is associated with his perceptual refinement by $r = .56$ ($p < .001$), the corelation r between mass media exposure and perceptual refinement is .38 ($p < .001$).

Postulate (3): Relative to personal and interpersonal communication, mass media communication is limited in its acculturation function due to its inability to directly regulate the immigrant's communication behavior.

While the mass media communication lacks control and regulation of an immigrant's communication behaviors, it broadens the scope of the individual's understanding of the host culture. (See Postulate 1.) Mass media transmit messages about the host culture beyond the limited social environment in which an immigrant carries on his day-to-day activities. Also, mass media communication provides the informational basis upon which an immigrant can act out his own personal and interpersonal communication. What one learns from the mass media might not always work in his communication with people around him. Nevertheless, the stereotypical understanding of the communication mode of the host culture provides some basis upon which he can experiment in his own communication interaction. Furthermore, what an immigrant learns through his interpersonal communication experiences, in turn, prepares him to be more receptive and appreciative of the messages on mass media.

Studies of foreign immigrants (reported earlier) have provided some empirical support for the above theoretical inference (Kim, 1977, 1978, 1979b). In all ethnic groups surveyed, an immigrant's consumption of the host mass media increases as his interpersonal communication with members of the host society increases on various levels of intimacy.

In the case of the Korean sample, the immigrant's interpersonal communication and media behavior was significantly related ($r = .45$, $p < .001$). Therefore, it is postulated that mass media communication and Interpersonal communication are a complementary and mutually reinforcing impetus in an immigrant's acculturation.

Postulate (4): Mass media communication and interpersonal communication are complementary, mutually reinforcing each other's acculturation function.

The complementary inter-dependence between mass media communication and interpersonal communication should be particularly significant during the intial phase of an immigrant's acculturation process. During this phase, the immigrant has not yet developed a sufficient communication competence to develop satisfactory interpersonal relationships with members of the host society. The communication experiences in direct face-to-face contact with members of the host society can often be frustrating and burdensome. The immigrant may often feel awkward and out of place in relating to other people: the direct negative feedback from the other person can be too overwhelming to experience pleasure in the interaction with members of the host society.

A natural tendency for an immigrant experiencing such interpersonal discomfort is to avoid, when possible, direct contacts with members of the host society. Instead, he can resort to mass media as an alternative, pressure-free channel through which he can relate to the host

society. The complementary function of mass media, therefore, is considered more salient among the immigrants who perceive themselves less than satisfactory in their interpersonal competence in communicating with members of the host society. This inference is shared by Ryu (1976) who has studied foreign students' reliance on mass media as sources of acculturation.

Postulate (5): The acculturation function of mass media communication, complementing that of personal and interpersonal communication, is particularly strong during the initial phase of acculturation.

Toward a Theory

So far, I have made an initial attempt to develop a theory of mass media communication in the acculturation process. In so doing, I have challenged the traditional linear assumption which views media communication as a stimulus or cause, and an immigrant's acculturation as a response or effect. Such a linear model, in studying the dynamic, interactive processes of mass media communication and acculturation, is incomplete and less than realistic. Thus, I have reconceptualized the acculturation process from an interactive communication perspective, and defined the nature of the communication-acculturation process through five axioms. Based on the axioms, I have proposed five

theoretical postulates. Additional emphasis has been placed on the importance of viewing the acculturation function of mass media communication, not in isolation, but in the context of the total communication experiences of an immigrant.

The process of communication-acculturation and the role of mass media communication in this process is a viable object of scientific study because of its theoretical and social significance. The global, intercultural interactions increase daily with the help of modern communications technology. As a consequence, our need to understand how and why mass media assist us in adapting to a new cultural system, and how we can maximize its potential benefits for a smoother transition from one culture to another, also grows.

The five axioms and the five postulates presented in this paper are not complete in describing and explaining the complex process of mass communication and acculturation. I do hope, however, that this paper has provided a sound and realistic beginning for the future refinement of a theory and its empirical verifications.

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